

To: Connecticut State Legislature Appropriations Committee

From: Jacqueline Scott, 4 Stephanie Lane South, Darien, CT. 06820

I am a resident of Darien, CT writing in support of S.B 1195, which I encourage you to pass. As a parent of a child who was left behind by the public system in our district, I am writing in support of a bill that will encourage schools to meet the needs of all children it serves and give parents choices of alternative public schools that can meet the needs when their home school does not.

From first to third grade my son struggled desperately while trying to learn to read and write. While I believed something was wrong, I was repeatedly told by the school psychologist and special education teachers that it was probably "developmental", or that he just needed a "little extra work on phonics and organization." When he could not read a first grade book by the end of third grade I took him to be tested privately, which revealed he had the reading level of a 5 1/2 yr old and had broad-based language learning disabilities. We were also told he would always need broad-based support and may never go to college.

Desperate to help him, I signed up as a teacher (I was not) and attended a six week teacher training institute that summer at the Windward School in White Plains, NY. Windward is a specialized, private school for children with dyslexia and language based learning disabilities. Within one day of being there, I came away saying "This is exactly what he needs! He can absolutely learn this way." What did they do that was so special? NOTHING THAT COULD NOT BE DONE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS!

What Windward did was use scientifically validated research that shows that children with reading problems need to be taught in a direct, multisensory, systematic way, with all the rules of the English language explicitly taught. What are they doing in the public schools, you may ask? Not this. At the time, my district was essentially using a whole language approach, the antitheses of what he needed and an approach that has subsequently been proven as ineffective at serving the needs of many children. Unfortunately, I had no choice as to how he was taught because this was the district's curriculum.

My husband and I, in concert with a new reading specialist at our district who was wonderful but stretched extremely thin, decided that the only way for Tyler to "catch up" and have any chance at academic success and reaching college, was to send him to Windward. As the reading specialist said, "I have him once a week for 40 minutes in a class with 17 students, at Windward he will be getting the help he needs every day. If you can afford it, there is no comparison between what he can get here and what he can get at Windward." We decided to spend the money we had put away for his college education on his elementary education so he would have a fighting chance in life.

This was not an easy decision. Tyler was devastated that he had to leave his friends. He thought he was going to a school for "stupid" kids. I vividly remember driving him the 25 miles to school the first day and seeing a tear roll down his face as he asked me "Mom, why can't they help me in Darien?" I had

no answer. As I pulled out of the driveway to the school I had to pull over as I broke down sobbing thinking "It's not fair that a 10 year old boy has to leave his friends and community he knows just to learn to read." I also thanked God we had the resources to help our son and felt awful that those who could not had no way to help their child.

Tyler's reading improved 2 grade levels on standardized tests in his first year. By the end of 4 years he was within the normal range in all areas. He returned to Darien for high school and ran into many of the same issues again, with teachers not recognizing the needs of children with different learning issues and delivering curriculum without using scientifically valid methods of delivery. While high school was a struggle, he at least had a solid foundation off which to work because of Windward.

Tyler is now a sophomore at High Point University and we could not be more proud of him and his resilience. However, the public school system almost destroyed him. I am writing to ask for your support of this bill because we need schools to be held accountable for its students and to have an incentive to provide programs that meet the needs of all students.

If this bill had been in effect when Tyler was younger, perhaps there would have been a public school serving students in Fairfield County with similar learning needs that we could have sent Tyler to. School districts need to have an incentive to provide the best programs possible so they do not funding for their own students. Teachers need to have an incentive to keep current on methods of curriculum delivery that meet all of their students' needs.

Currently, there is a school bus (paid for by the parents) full of children who leave Darien every morning headed for Windward so they can learn how to read and write. It does not take a genius to figure out there is something wrong with this picture. If this is what is happening in a "blue chip" school district, I can only imagine the injustices being inflicted on children in districts where parents don't have the financial or educational means to advocate for their children.

Please support S.B 1195 and give our children a "fighting chance."

Sincerely,

Jacqueline B. Scott

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